

## B U R R O

Domestic animals are pretty much the same the world over, I suppose, if we make allowance for such local specializations as elephants in India, camels in Arabia, llamas in the Andean region, and yaks in Tibet. The visitor to northeast Brazil, in regarding the domestic animals, is likely to be most impressed by the important part played by oxen, goats and donkeys.

Most of us are familiar with the word burro, through its use, due to Mexican influence, in our own Southwest. I was not prepared for the pronunciation given to it in Pernambuco, where the doubled r has almost the sound of an h, and the u has the sound of oo in boot. But I was still more surprised to learn that when the Pernambucano speaks of a burro he refers ordinarily, not to a donkey, but to a mule. According to the dictionary it means donkey, but according to the usage of the people it means mule. There is a word (mu, feminine mula) in the dictionary for mule; but it is seldom employed in northeast Brazil, where a mule is a burro, and a donkey is a jumento.

I once bought a jumento under rather unusual circumstances. Our school was located on a campus of about thirty-five acres, in the edge of town, and, as is customary, there was a brick wall along the street side, with an iron gate for entrance. The gate stayed open all day, as there were people going in and out almost constantly. The jumento in question was an old one, which had got its foot injured in some sort of accident, so that it was crippled beyond all hope of ever being useful again. Its owner simply turned it loose, to pick up food where it might, and having learned that there was grass on the school campus it decided to stay there, and was always to be seen near the gate, where it was an eyesore and a general nuisance. I found out who was the owner, and protested to him; but he said that the animal had to go somewhere, and that he could not be responsible for where it went. I had it taken to the public pound, but the official in charge, knowing that the owner had no use for it, and therefore would never come for it, simply released the beast, and it was back at school the same day. Finally, deciding that desperate diseases require desperate remedies, I sent for the owner, and proposed to buy the animal, and after much haggling he sold

the jumento to me for ten mil reis, or about fifty cents as exchange was then. I made him give me a bill of sale and legal receipt, so as to have no claims afterward, and then I had a man take the poor brute out to a convenient place and put an end to his sufferings. I thought I was doing a humane thing; but I was severely criticised by many people of the town, as a cruel, inhuman monster. It took a long time to live down the story of that jumento.

Northeast Brazil is a land of horses. Until the opening of passable motor roads in recent years, the only practical mode of travel through the interior, away from the few railroads, was horseback riding; and there are still many places where the roads or trails are impassable for cars. And of course the people on the farms still use horses a great deal. Only the stallions are considered proper for riding. Mares are all right for pack animals, but not worthy the dignity of a man. Geldings are rare. The Brazilians have the idea that castrating a horse takes away something of his strength and spirit, and seldom practice it. Horse drawn vehicles are almost unknown. Horses, mules or donkeys are extensively used as pack animals, but not for draught purposes. On the big sugar plantations near the coast I have seen a few horse drawn carriages, and during the second World War, when cars could not run for lack of fuel some people improvised two-wheel carts out of old auto parts, to be drawn by horses; but these were innovations. The native stock of horses are small, but tough and wiry, some of them quite good. Many of the men are extremely skillful and daring riders, but when the country women ride horseback they use a side saddle, and put on a long dress for the sake of modesty. In addition, a woman seems to feel that she is not properly dressed for riding unless she has on a hat, although they practically never use hats on any other occasion. The hat is usually something that looks as if it has been in the attic since her grandmother's time, so that her general appearance is often comical indeed.

Of course a donkey is not a suitable animal for riding, but you may sometimes see a man riding one, for a short distance. And when he does so, he almost invariably sits far back on the animal's rump. How they keep from sliding off is more than I could ever imagine. But a good saddle mule is highly esteemed, and I was surprised to learn



that its price is much higher than that of a saddle horse of comparable quality -- often twice or three times as much.

In driving mules or donkeys, the word used in place of our word "giddap" is the word burro, pronounced forcefully, and bringing out the last syllable with a sort of jerk. By the same token, in driving a horse the word "vayo" is used, which is doubtless a corruption of the word cavalo, horse.

The draught animal of Brazil is the ox. It is only recently that tractors have begun to be used, and practically all the plowing, even on the large plantations, is done with oxen. The two-wheeled ox wagon has been to a considerable extent replaced by the motor truck, but is still very much in evidence throughout the interior. There has never been a factory for manufacturing these wagons, but they are always made by hand, by local craftsmen. The wheels are about five feet in diameter, and are made of solid wood, that is, they are not spoke wheels, but are made of pieces of thick board nailed together with cross pieces, cut into the form of a circle, and shod with an iron tire. In the center of each wheel is a square opening, into which the axle is fitted, so that the two wheels and the axle form one piece, revolving together. The body and tongue of the wagon form another piece, which is lifted and placed on the wheels, the axle fitting into slots on the underneath side of the body, in which it revolves. These axles are never greased, and in motion, especially with a heavy load, make a screeching that can be heard almost a mile. I wondered at first why the people could not learn such an elementary principle as that of the reduction of friction by lubrication, but afterwards I learned that they like this sound. They say that the wagon "sings"; and there is a couplet among their proverbs:

Quando o carro não quer cantar  
Bota o carreiro a cismar.

"When the wagon won't sing, the wagoner gets worried." It does have rather a musical sound when you get used to listening to it; and one gets accustomed to being wakened before daylight on market days by the "singing" of a long series of ox wagons coming into town to the feira.

The native stock of cattle has been greatly improved in recent years by the introduction of Brahma bulls, and one sees some magnificent specimens. There are numerous ticks and other parasites, but nature has its compensations. There is a bird called the anum, which gets its living chiefly by picking the ticks off cattle. The cattle seem grateful for this service, and remain quite still under the bird's ministrations.

Cattle are usually driven through to market, that is, in most instances, from the fazendas of the sertão to the great cities on the coast, often hundreds of miles. They travel along the highways in herds of fifty to a hundred, accompanied by men on horseback or on foot. An ox is called a boi, and such a herd is referred to as a boiada. To meet a boiada on the highway is a simple matter; you simply stop your car and wait for the animals to pass. But to overtake one and pass it is sometimes quite a trying experience. The drivers are usually very cooperative, and go dashing in, laying about with a stick, and shouting, to open a way for the car; but even so sometimes the oxen close it up again before you can take proper advantage of it. The driver of the car heaves a sigh of relief on getting clear of the boiada — and then very likely comes on another in less than a mile.

Naturally, cattle are kept for milk as well as for meat, and the sight of the milk men with their cans of milk on their heads going about the streets is a feature of the life in the interior towns. Cows are generally milked only once a day; and without refrigeration the milk must be delivered as quickly as possible. Some milk in the morning, others in the afternoon, and arrangements may be made to have the milk delivered either in the morning or in the afternoon, as may be most convenient. Since very few interior homes have any sort of refrigeration (up to the time this is written) the custom is to boil the milk immediately on receiving it, and thus it may be kept sweet for twelve hours or more. Milkmen of the interior are prone to water the milk. To avoid this, the public health service places officers on the streets to test the milk with a hydrometer, and any milk found deficient is poured out in the street. To get by this, some ingenious milkmen conceived the idea of mixing starch or some similar substance with the milk, so that it would still have the required



specific gravity, after having been liberally watered. The presence of this is easily detected in the use of the milk however, and those milkmen find it difficult to keep their customers.

In the interior towns there are a number of creameries and small cheese factories, where a tolerable quality of butter and cheese are made. I know nothing of the technique of cheese making; but the cheese made in these local plants is white, and seems cruder than even the cheaper grades of cheese made in the United States, but is not bad eating raw, while thick slices fried or toasted in a skillet and served hot, are delicious. (Some very fine cheeses are made in the more advanced southern part of Brazil.) On the plantations too far from these creameries and cheese factories for effective marketing of milk homemade cheese and butter are made. The butter is melted and poured into bottles, where it will keep for some time. Several types of homemade cheese are made, which vary of course with the skill and care of the maker. At its best, this homemade cheese is delicious. As many of my pupils were from plantations in the sertão, I often received presents of homemade cheese and bottled butter on their return to school after holidays.

Sheep and goats are abundant. Brazil is one of the major sources of the world's supply of goatskins for making ladies' shoes. In the port cities one often sees these dried skins, bound together to form great bales, being loaded on ships for export. I had never seen red sheep before going to Brazil, but solid (dark) red, or mottled red and white, are common there. I never heard anyone speak of shearing sheep there, and I believe the wool produced is not considered sufficient in quantity or quality to justify the labor of saving and marketing it. In the sertão, especially the drier portions of it, extensive use is often made of goats' milk, but where cattle may be raised people seldom bother with goats' milk. Sheep and goats run on the ranges, often unfenced, and are frequently met with in great numbers on the highways. But whereas the motorist must use great care to avoid hitting the sheep, it is a rare thing for a goat to be hit.